

APPENDIX.

LETTER FROM DR. EDWARD JARVIS, OF MASSACHUSETTS, UPON THE
CLASSIFICATION OF DISEASES.

DORCHESTER, MASS., September 22, 1855.

DEAR SIR : I have your late favor of the 17th ult. now before me, and also the nosological nomenclature of the mortality of the United States in the year ending June, 1850.

I have examined the catalogue of diseases with very great care in all its relations. I have compared it with the established and authorized systems, and especially those adopted by the American National Medical Association and published in their Transactions for 1847, and by the Registration office of England. I have moreover submitted your papers to some of the most learned scholars and professors of medical science in New England.

In order to have this nosology of the Census the most perfect and in the best accordance with the received views of the present time, I have examined the reports of mortality of every State and city in the Union which have published their bills, and also the English and some of the Swiss reports, as well as the best writers on nosology. The result of all this inquiry, which has taken my time since the receipt of yours, I now send to you.

Your document is to be not only permanent, but also of very extensive use. It is to speak to the whole world of the diseases and mortality of the United States in the year 1849-'50; and it will be to them, for the present at least, the only authority in these matters. It is also to speak to all future ages of the deaths and their causes in this country at the present time, and perhaps it will be the only authority that will survive.

It is therefore of the utmost consequence that your statements should not only correspond exactly with the facts, but also be so clearly made that they be perfectly understood by all, and in the same way, and that the facts they represent be placed distinctly in the minds of all your readers.

For these purposes, I have made, and I propose to you to make, sundry and divers alterations in the nosological system that you sent to me, which will bring it more into harmony with the best scientific ideas of the time, and place the country, as to its mortality and the causes thereof, and you, as the historian of these matters for 1850, rightly before the world.

In doing this work, I have had much occasion to regret that you could not send me all the original returns, or, at least, a copy of all the manifold names of diseases or causes of death, which came to your office from the several districts of the Union, and also the names of the States and the counties in which they were found.

A great majority of these names of disease were to be translated into scientific and more intelligible language. It is not always easy to determine what disease a popular term represents, in what class it shall be included, and what legitimate name shall be used for it there.

Looking at the catalogue of names you sent to me, and which is condensed from the multifarious list that came to you, looking also at the explanations you have given in connection with your list, it is manifest that there is, and there must be, some latitude in this translation and interpretation, and that also there may be some difference of opinion among the various persons who examine the original returns.

Many of these popular names of diseases have only a local use and meaning, many are not even known beyond the district where they are used. It is, then, improbable that any one man, however learned in this science, could understand and interpret and arrange the whole, and yet it is very necessary that all the diseases or causes of death reported to you should be faithfully represented and described in some of the classes and by some of the terms you adopt, and that few or none should be put into the uninformative class of the "unknown;" nor should they be published under names that will convey no ideas, or uncertain ideas, or different ideas to different persons.

I was, therefore, desirous, and in my former correspondence with you I urged, that a physician who is an accomplished medical scholar should have the supervision of this branch of your department; that he should carefully examine all the original returns, and reduce their manifold and varied language to the legitimate and recognized nomenclature, and then, whenever he should find any word of local and doubtful or unintelligible meaning, he should correspond with the best physicians of the State or region where the unknown words were found, and thus ascertain what disease they were intended to represent.

Wanting the original names, from which, perhaps, I might have made a different list from this which I now send to you, I have taken this, your translated and condensed catalogue, and made further alterations, as you will see, based, of course, on the facts therein stated.

In doing this I have omitted the names of several diseases which alone and unaccompanied are not fatal, and also several which have no distinct and specific meaning. Some of them I propose to include among the "unknown," because the disease stated gives no clue to the real cause of death. There are others among these names of disease which, although not the real cause of death, yet indicate that some disease of the same class, or of the same organ or system of organs, produced the fatal event. These I propose to include in the genus or class in general where they are found, without attempting to specify their particular nature.

I have condensed several names which are synonymous of each other.

I have exchanged several names for others which were considered as the better representatives of their diseases.

I have also added some diseases that were omitted, but which are in the systems adopted here and elsewhere, and which are the causes of considerable mortality.

In this way I have reduced the list of diseases from the one hundred and forty-eight given in your paper to one hundred and fourteen, which include all that you present, besides some others which I have added.

1, chicken pox; 2, disease of eyes; 3, herpes; 4, hives; 5, mumps; 6, onanism; 7, ringworm; 8, suppressed menses; 9, tetter; 10, vaccination; 11, fluor albus, are all omitted for the reason first stated: standing alone, they cannot safely be given as the causes of death. For yourself, and for the country, you would not take the responsibility of stating abroad that these diseases, which are not destructive elsewhere, are fatal here, nor would you state to the readers of another year or another age, that these maladies, which were harmless as to life, before and after 1850, were in that year the causes of death.

It need not be denied that these diseases did exist at the time of death, but they were merely incidents in connection with the really fatal disease, or perhaps consequences of it; they may have performed a part, at most a small part, of the destructive process, but could not have accomplished it alone.

1. *Chicken pox*, a very mild and harmless disease, yet sometimes bears so strong a resemblance to small pox as to be mistaken for it. Probably those cases which are stated to be of fatal chicken pox were really small pox, the real name, if not character, of which was mistaken. It would be proper, therefore, to put these with *diseases of the skin*.

4. *Hives*, varicella pustular or globular, (not urticaria, as in your paper,) chicken pox, or swine pox, the former may have been mistaken for small pox, and thus proved fatal. These should be in *diseases of the skin*.

Hives, or *bold hives*, is a name applied to croup; it is a corruption of *heaves*, descriptive of the paroxysms. If there be any evidence that croup was intended, the cases should be transferred to that.

3. *Herpes*, 7. *Ringworm*, 9. *Tetter*, are all harmless diseases, and, unless in combination with other and more serious diseases, could not be assumed as causes of death. Strictly speaking, they should be transferred to the *unknown*, yet, as they may have been mistaken for some other cutaneous disease, I propose to include these in the *diseases of the skin*.

2. *Disease of the eyes* may involve disease of the brain; but otherwise it is not fatal. It should, therefore, be included in *diseases of the brain and nervous system*.

5. *Mumps* comes under the same category as the last. It may be connected with disease of the brain, and it may coexist with other and fatal disease. It would be safer to put these cases in the *unknown*.

I am aware that the Massachusetts, New York State and city, Kentucky, and Philadelphia reports give cases of *parotitis* (mumps) as causes of death. Yet the English reports omit it, and the National Medical Association excluded it.

6. *Onanism* possibly, but not probably, was a cause of death. It wastes life and produces other disorders. Cases under this head should be put under the *unknown*.

8. *Suppression of menses* (amenorrhœa) is a symptom or consequence of many other diseases. It generally happens in diseases of high excitement, as fevers, &c.; and also in diseases of waste—consumption, scrofula, and cancer, especially uterine. It may be safe to put these cases in the *diseases of the organs of generation*.

11. *Fluor Albus*, unless complicated with disease of the uterus, as inflammation, cancer, &c., is not a fatal disease. This is put in *diseases of organs of generation*.

10. *Vaccination* may have been followed by inflammation, or erysipelas, in constitutions peculiarly susceptible, which terminated fatally. These, if known, should be given as the cause of death; otherwise the cases stated to be from this cause should be in the *unknown*; but *small-pox*, certainly, should not include them.

12. *Amputation* comes nearly under the same category as vaccination. It may have been in itself fatal; yet it is probable that such event was rather the result of previous disease, for which the operation was performed; or a subsequent disease, inflammation, erysipelas, &c., which should have been stated. Wanting these facts, cases reported under this name should be in the *unknown*.

13. *Cachexia* describes nothing. It signifies merely a depraved or diseased state of the system, a low vitality. These should be in the *unknown*.

14. *Congestion* is equally untelligible and should be in the same class, the *unknown*. 15. *Congestion of the brain*, probably, is apoplexy; yet it may not be. Other affections may have been intended. It should, then, be in *diseases of the brain*.

16. *Cramp*, as ordinarily understood, is not fatal. If this was a real cause of death, and was what is called "cramp in the stomach," it was *colic*; if it was "cramp of the muscles," it was *tetanus* and should be thus arranged; otherwise in the *unknown*.

17. *Eruption* is the most vague and unsatisfactory term, meaning, at most, *disease of the skin*, to which it should probably be transferred.

18. *Brain, congestion of*, probably intended for apoplexy. Yet it may be used for other cerebral affections which are not revealed in the returns. I have placed this, therefore, in *diseases of brain and nerves*.

19. *Fever, bilious*, is a most vague and uncertain term. In some regions it seems to be used

for all sorts of fevers, and the word *bilious* for all sorts of difficulties of the digestive organs.

20. *Gastric fever* is probably intended for inflammation of the stomach. Yet it is in many places used as vaguely, in respect to fever, as the word *bilious*.

21. *Winter fever* is more vague than either of the last two. It may mean *bilious*, or *typhus*, or *synochus*.

These three, with specific names, conveys no specific idea, and should be included under the general name of *fever* without further description.

22. *Congestive fever* is merely a form or phase of *typhus*.

23. *Inflammatory fever* is a name sometimes given to cases of *typhus*.

These two are therefore included in *typhus fever*.

24. *Brain fever* is usually intended for *cephalitis*, inflammation of brain, and yet it is sometimes used for *typhus fever*, in which there is some cerebral irritation. It is safe, however, to call these cases *cephalitis*.

25. *Menses, excess of*, a mere menorrhagia, excess of the menstrual flux, is seldom or never fatal of itself. There is not unfrequently a great and fatal uterine hæmorrhage, growing out of uterine disease, which is the true cause of the death. These cases, therefore, should be strictly referred to *uterine hæmorrhage*. But as this is generally dependent on an anterior cause, it is better to include the whole in *diseases of the organs of generation*.

Menses, suppression of, already referred to.

26. *Milk leg*, not in itself fatal, yet was an accompaniment of the fatal disease. I include this in *childbirth*.

The last fifteen diseases (12 to 26, inclusive) reappear in their respective genera, or classes, or in the unknown. If, however, you conclude to retain them, or any part of them, it would be well to append a note to each one, thus: *This term has an uncertain meaning, yet it is here printed as found in the original returns*. This would throw the responsibility of unscientific or unreliable statements of the causes of death where it belongs; yet it is best to be accurate, and make the corrections as proposed.

There are also many terms, which being synonyms of each other, are condensed so far as they can be. 27, *canker*; 28, *canker rash*; 29, *putrid sore throat*. These are but various names for *scarlet fever*, which includes them.

30. *Bronchitis*; there seems to be an error in the explanation connected with this term in your paper. It is an inflammation of the mucous membrane of the bronchial tubes in the lungs. It is, however, generally applied to the lining membrane of all the air vessels, both to those in the chest and the throat, and very commonly to those in the head.

It is not exclusively a chronic disease, but is more often acute. Neither is it exclusively a disease of adult years, for children are subject to it.

Nor, on the other, is *catarrh* exclusively an acute disease, or one of childhood, for it is often chronic and it comes upon persons of all ages.

The true distinction between *bronchitis* and *catarrh*, and one that was held by scientific writers is, that the former affected the lining of the bronchi, or larger air tubes *below the throat*, and the latter affected the air passages *in the head*, principally the lining of the nasal passages. But there is very little discrimination between these diseases, both names being used to designate inflammation of the mucous membrane of any of the air passages. Therefore, 31, *Catarrh*, and 32, *Catarrhal fever*, are both included in *bronchitis*.

31. *Chlorosis*, is included in *paramenia*, and strictly it should be in *diseases of the generative organs*.

34. *Debility*; general custom does not confine this cause of death to infancy. The bills of mortality in all the States and cities which have printed them, include deaths from debility at all ages, from infancy to 90 and over. Unless, therefore, your returns limit the deaths under this head to infancy, or you have and use the means of thus limiting the cases, your explanation will not cover the whole ground, and should be omitted. The term itself is a bad one, and amounts to but little more than the unknown.

35. *Hæmorrhoids* is a better term than *piles*, and includes it.

36. *Head, disease of*, is included in *disease of brain*, &c.

37. *Inflammation of the brain* is included in *Cephalitis*; 38, *Inflammation of the lungs*, is included in *Pneumonia*; 39, *Inflammation of the throat*, is included in *laryngitis*.

40. *Killed*, is included in *accident*; 41, *Lockjaw*, is included in *tetanus*.

42. *Lungs, disease of*, is included in *respiratory organs, disease of*; 43, *nerves, disease of*, is included in *brain and nervous system, disease of*; 44, *piles* is included in *hæmorrhoids*; 45, *premature birth* is included in *debility*; 46, *putrid sore throat* is included in *scarlet fever*; 47, *salivation* may safely be included in *effects of mercury*; 48, *stomach, disease of*, is included in *digestive organs, disease of*; 49, *summer complaint* is included in *cholera morbus*; 50, *sunstroke* is included in *heat*; 51, *throat, disease of*, is included in *bronchitis and laryngitis*; 52, *venereal* is included in *syphilis*; 53, *bowels, disease of*, is included in *digestive organs, disease of*; 54, *atrophy* is included in *marasmus* which includes *tubercles mesenterica*. These terms, from 27 to 54 inclusive, excepting numbers 30, 34, and 35, are omitted in my text, and condensed with, or replaced by, others.

There are some others concerning which I have great doubts, and yet I have let them remain, mainly for want of doing better.

55. *Dirt eating*. Probably this is secondary to a morbid condition of the stomach, dyspepsia, irritation, or craving for strange things, as in certain female and, perhaps, male diseases, slate pencils are eaten, which may precede death but are not deemed its cause.

56. *Fracture*, alone in itself, is a very doubtful cause of death. The shock communicated to the system by the blow or fall that caused the fracture, may and often does produce death. Also, the subsequent conditions, inflammation, erysipelas, &c., may cause death. Sometimes one has two or more limbs broken, and these in more places than one, and death follows. In this case, it is rather the violent shock to the system than the breaking of the bone, that is the fatal cause. Yet, I have let this, and the preceding, 55, remain.

I have introduced, as you see, several terms to represent either some of yours which I have omitted, or some diseases which I have omitted, or some diseases which seem to be omitted in yours.

These are—	They represent—
1. <i>Anæmia</i>	<i>Consumption of the blood</i> , a common term.
2. <i>Bones, disease of</i>	<i>Necrosis</i> .
3. <i>Cephalitis</i>	<i>Inflammation of the brain</i> ; <i>brain fever</i> .
4. <i>Circulatory organs, disease of</i>	Many cases here are reported under this general class or name.
5. <i>Cold water drinking</i>	A very common cause of death in summer, especially among laborers.
6. <i>Delirium tremens</i>	<i>Mania-a-potu</i> .
7. <i>Digestive organs, disease of</i>	<i>Disease of bowels</i> ; <i>disease of stomach</i> , but not <i>tubercles mesenteria</i> .
8. <i>Enteritis</i>	<i>Inflammation of bowels</i> .
9. <i>Gastritis</i>	<i>Inflammation of stomach</i> .
10. <i>Generative organs, disease of</i>	<i>Fluor albus</i> ; <i>disease of uterus</i> ; <i>excessive menses</i> ; <i>uterine hæmorrhage</i> , and perhaps <i>suppressed menses</i> .
11. <i>Hæmorrhoids</i>	<i>Piles</i> .
12. <i>Joints, disease of</i>	Many cases are reported under this title, and I suppose you must have found such in your returns.
13. <i>Parvenia</i>	<i>Diseases of menstruation</i> ; <i>excessive or suppressed menses</i> , (if no other cause of death,) and <i>chlorosis</i> .
14. <i>Pneumonia</i>	<i>Inflammation of lungs</i> .
15. <i>Respiratory organs, disease of</i>	<i>Disease of lungs</i> .
16. <i>Skin, disease of</i>	<i>Eruption</i> ; <i>herpes</i> ; <i>hives</i> , (if not croup;) <i>ringworm</i> ; <i>tetter</i> ; <i>chicken pox</i> .

With these alterations, I have made out the list of diseases, which I now send to you on other sheets.

I have made this list according to the alphabetical arrangement, as you have done. Yet it is better, if possible, to arrange the diseases into classes according to their natural affinities, or the affinities of their causes, or to the organs and systems in which they are found. This plan is adopted by the English Registrar General, by the American National Medical Association, and by the registration officers of Massachusetts and Kentucky, and it shows, at least, the parts or systems of the human frame which suffered, or the general character of the causes that produced the disease.

I have therefore sent you a duplicate schedule of this nosological system, arranged according to this classification.

I hope you will print the entire list of all the names of diseases, or causes of death, that you found in all the returns, with the names of the States from which they came. This will take but a few pages and will do a good service to the investigator of these things. When we prepared the nosological nomenclature for the National Medical Association, in 1847, we obtained all the names that were returned in the Massachusetts reports for several years, and those that were printed in the various States and cities, and from all other sources we could reach. In this way we obtained about eleven hundred names of diseases supposed to be fatal. These we reduced to a scientific catalogue of about one hundred and fifteen. Mr. Farr, of London, did the same for the British government. He found about a thousand popular names, which he reduced and systematised.

There never has been, and there may not be again, another opportunity, such as you now enjoy, of showing to the world the popular names of diseases which are found in the several States and thought to be fatal. Of course, you will not give numbers and tables in connection with this popular nosology, only the bare names, alphabetically arranged, with the names of the States or region where they are used, as New England, Middle, Northwest, Southern, Southwest, or if in only one or two States they should be mentioned. These would take two columns.

I hope I have not delayed you too long. I desired to let you have this earlier; but there was so much investigation needed to determine all the principles and facts that this was impossible; and I would not send you a report less perfect than such as the range of means about me would allow me to give you.*

As it is, it is at your service. Trusting that it may be followed in your book, I am, very respectfully, yours,

J. D. B. DE BOW, Esq.
Superintendent of Census, Washington, D. C.

EDWARD JARVIS.

* In the Compendium of the Census, p. 121, 8d paragraph, Dr. Jarvis is made to say "certainly for one port," instead of "certainly for the seaports;" (5th line.)